



August 30, 2021

**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**  
REGION 5  
77 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD  
CHICAGO, IL 60604-3590

Reverend Edward Pinkney  
President, Benton Harbor Community Water Council  
Via email to

Dear Rev. Pinkney:

Thank you for your August 9, 2021 letter, as well as the participation of the Benton Harbor Water Council and its partners in the August 4, 2021 call and the earlier July 2021 Stakeholder Roundtable for EPA's Review of the Lead and Copper Rule Revisions. We share your concerns regarding Benton Harbor's water system's drinking water quality and appreciate your perspective.

EPA works closely with state partners to carry out our shared responsibilities under environmental laws. The State of Michigan, through its department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), has the authority to administer the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). EPA oversees EGLE's implementation of SDWA and maintains its independent authorities to take action to help ensure public health protection.

EPA Region 5 Water Division is in frequent communication with State staff including about the drinking water issues mentioned in your email. EGLE described in detail its continued and high level of direct assistance provided to Benton Harbor's water system, including funding as well as enforcement actions taken, over recent years. EGLE reports that the State is ensuring federal Lead and Copper Rule (LCR) requirements are met, along with the more stringent State rule requirements. EPA Region 5 will continue engagement with EGLE regarding SDWA requirements and has offered technical assistance to the State.

To reduce lead in Benton Harbor's drinking water, on June 7, 2021, EPA awarded a \$5.6 million grant to the City of Benton Harbor to fund reduction in lead exposure from drinking water. The grant, provided by the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act of 2016, enables the City to accelerate and expand its work to properly identify service line materials and to replace lead service lines. This grant also is funding an optimization study for the city's corrosion control treatment to reduce lead levels in Benton Harbor's drinking water system. The optimization study work began in April 2021 with a request for proposals from qualified firms and is expected to be completed in 2022; lead service line replacement work is expected to begin in late 2021 and continue through 2024. The City has also applied to EGLE for Drinking Water State Revolving Funds to continue lead service line replacement work beyond the EPA funding.

We also appreciate your concerns about elevated lead from drinking water plumbing sources in Benton Harbor and your request to ensure widespread water filter use to address it. Berrien County Health Department (BCHD), with funding from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, is leading the effort to distribute water filters in Benton Harbor. Based upon a conversation with Mr. Jeffrey Sims of BCHD, a sufficient supply of water filters and replacement cartridges are available at no cost to all residents of Benton Harbor. BCHD provides several options for obtaining water filters and replacement cartridges as explained on BCHD's website,<sup>1</sup> as well as distribution and outreach at the weekly Farmers Market in downtown Benton Harbor (Wednesdays mid-June to mid-September, 10 am to 3 pm). Mr. Sims also noted appreciation for your previous assistance with lead in drinking water outreach, and an openness to future partnerships. EPA encourages the Benton Harbor Community Water Council and other organizations to contact BCHS on a partnership to facilitate water filter distribution to Benton Harbor residents. EPA remains committed to protecting public health and assuring compliance with the SDWA. We will continue to monitor this situation and stay in communication with our state partners at EGLE, and encourage as a next step for you to reach out to BCHD to explore ways to encourage and promote the existing programs for filter distribution in your community.

Again, thank you for your letter. Please continue to provide pertinent information regarding the water quality issues in Benton Harbor, as well as any additional questions on ALE follow-up measures, to EGLE, as the agency responsible for implementation of the Drinking Water program in Michigan, with a copy to the Chief of EPA Region 5's Ground Water Drinking Water Branch (bauer.candice.epa.gov). If you have additional follow-up questions for EPA Region 5, or would like to discuss Region 5's potential involvement in future discussions with the involved parties, please feel free to contact me (walts.alan@epa.gov).

Respectfully,



Alan Walts  
Director, Tribal and Multi-media Programs Office

CC: Eric Oswald, EGLE

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.berriencounty.org/1599/City-of-Benton-Harbor>